

EDUCATING THE FUTURE:

Architectural Education in International Perspective

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EDUCATING THE FUTURE: ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION IN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Edited by Esra Fidanoglu



ISTANBUL KÜLTÜR UNIVERSITY

Expanding architecture through education: Experimenting on the margins of our discipline

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Abstract

To discuss the future of architectural education it is important to point out the wide meaning of architecture today through looking at a series of innovative contemporary practices. Besides the tendency of architectural offices to design buildings including technologically complex 3D structures, more and more young architects tend to include social aspects into our discipline by realizing urban installations, relational performances and public events. Beyond physical interventions some of these spatial agencies even explore the dematerialization of our discipline through testing new media as participatory blogs as a means of making architecture. Even though this innovative way of approaching our profession is becoming increasingly relevant in architectural practices, education in many European institutions remains limited to the design and building technology of edifices with walls, doors, windows, terraces, roofs, often designed with the latest 3D modeling and rendering programs. Those projects are an important part of the studies for many students and should not be eliminated from the educational agenda. Anyhow the production of documents, models and renders is often ending up in the student's folder, contributing in the best case to the making of his or her portfolio. This paper claims that architectural education should be expanded beyond architecture as an object/ building towards integrating socially engaged approaches between the built and the lived. On one side it supports the production of innovative future agencies that experiment through practice the limits of our profession. On the other side those simple structures or virtual contributions can be realized with low budgets and have therefore the potential to become live projects with a real impact on the public realm of our cities.

Keywords: Expanding architecture; socially engaged; margins of profession; live projects

To discuss the future of architectural education it is important to point out the expanded meaning of architecture today through looking at a series of innovative contemporary agencies.

Besides designing buildings, more and more architects explore new ways of practicing architecture, often in order to involve people into the design process. Beyond physical means in form of constructed platforms, workshops and urban actions some of these practices explore the dematerialization of our discipline through the use of new media that become part of the design.

Even though this innovative way of approaching our profession is becoming increasingly relevant in architectural practices, education in many European institutions often remains limited to the design of the architectural object. This paper claims the importance of expanding architectural education in order to produce innovative future agencies that research through projects the limits of our profession.

Three practices on the edge of architecture

In order to argue how our discipline shifted towards an approach beyond designing buildings I will reveal three contemporary practices founded by architects that research through their work where architecture can be. Each practice will be presented through a short introduction on their profile followed-up by a project realized by the agency.

1. Ecosistema Urbano: Dreamhamar, Denmark, 2011-2013

„Everyone is invited to take part and contribute to the project by posting his or her idea online.“
¹²⁷

Ecosistema Urbano is a Madrid based group of architects and urban designers with a trans-disciplinary approach. The practice refers to their work as ‘urban social design’¹²⁸ by which they understand the design of environments, spaces and dynamics – or differently expressed they design social interaction within communities. The agency was involved into projects throughout Europe, including France, Italy, Spain and Denmark.

One of their principal projects is *Dreamhamar*, the design of the Stortorget Square in the center of Hamar, Denmark. Instead of designing a square for the city the office chose to design a participation- and network design process which I will explain briefly.

To realize the network design of the project *Ecosistema Urbano* established a temporary office onsite for the period of the design in order to interact with the local people. A series of working areas were part of the network design. Besides a preliminary design to give a first hunch on what the project could be the practice created two laboratories: A physical lab which was established to host themselves being present onsite for several month and to invite citizens for onsite actions and workshops. Further a digital lab was created in order to invite different designers and non-designers to participate into the project from throughout the world. Therefore a blog was created, a Facebook page established and online workshops organized. Another working area of the project was the application of urban actions in a sense of testing possible future uses, an approach commonly known under the term *tactical urbanism*¹²⁹. The method applies quick and simple interventions in order to test future uses of public space. Further the agency created a network with academic institutions to have proposals from students on the project coming from different disciplines. Finally *Ecosistema Urbano* related the project to the

¹²⁷ Ecosistema Urbano ‘What if...? Cities’, online campaign about city visions, 2009 http://aa-projects.eu/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/EU_ecosistemaurbano_Interview_E_web.pdf

¹²⁸ Ecosistema Urbano, About, www.ecosistemaurbano.com

¹²⁹ Street Plans, Tactical urbanism, Short-term Action, long term change, Volume 2, tacticalurbanismsalon.com

cultural backpack, a local project of Hamar, through which which artists were involved into the project.

The approach of the project raises the question about where the design is. The practice's focus is onto designing the participation in order to arrive at a final proposal rather than designing an end product placed in the site. To judge the success of the project would not be through the formal expression of the design but the involvement of people into the design. The role of the architect is shifted from designing the object towards designing the process.

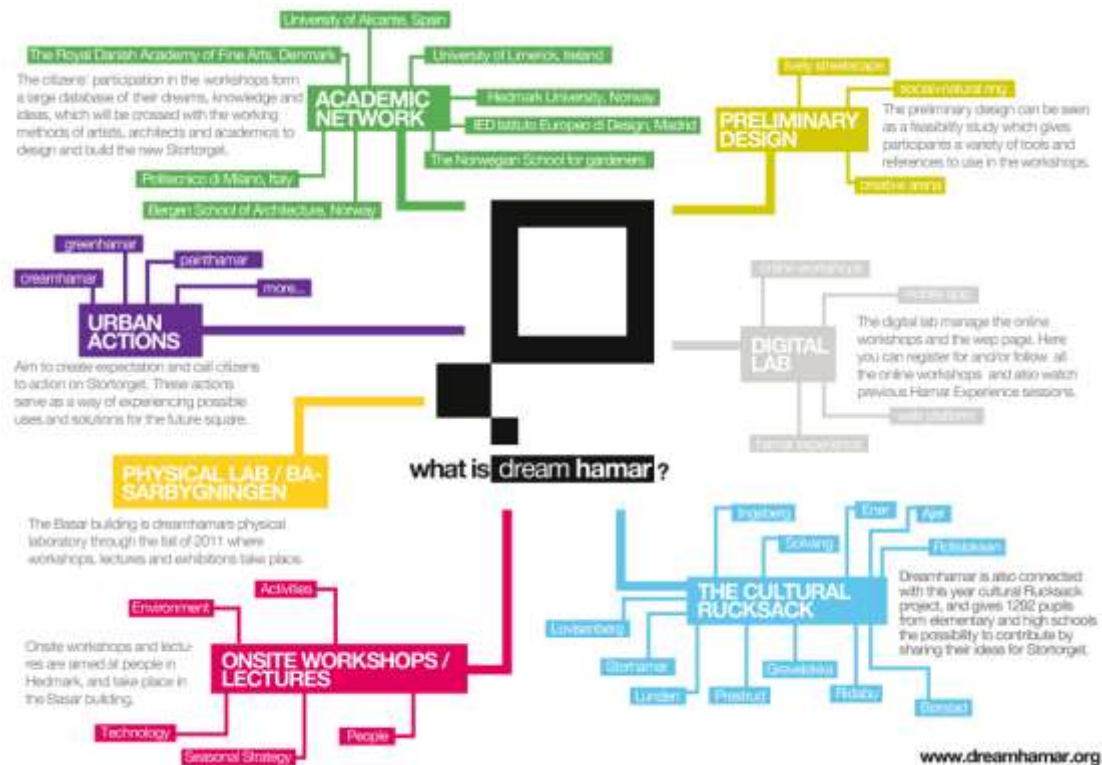


Image 1. Scheme of the network process design to involve people into the making of the Stortorget square in Hamar, www.ecosistemaurbano.org



Image 2. Announcement digital workshops to develop the Stortorget square in Hamar, www.ecosistemaurbano.org



Image 3. Onsite Workshop to develop the Stortorget square in Hamar, www.ecosistemaurbano.org

2. EXYZT: The REUNION Public House, London, 2012

„If space is made by dynamics of exchange, then everybody can be the architects of our world and encourage creativity, reflection and to renew social behaviors.“¹³⁰

The Paris-based agency *EXYZT* was founded in 2003 by five architects and later on expanded towards a multi-disciplinary collective of 20 persons, including architects, graphic designers, video-makers, photographers, botanists and constructors. The intention of the practice is to construct platforms that allow activity and life to happen. The projects are temporary urban installations that are auto-constructed and inhabited by the collective. Local communities are invited to engage and exchange on what the future of the site might be.

One of the latest projects of the agency is *the ReUNION Public House*. The site along the Union street in London, surrounded by office buildings, has been vacant for some years as the owner, Lake estate, is researching for a potential project for the site. Instead of keeping the site meanwhile vacant and lifeless, Lake estate invites designers to create some temporary use to happen on the site. Since 2008 those temporary occupations help to identify the future potentials for the site. *EXYZT* realized two of the four installations. While ‘Southwalk Lido’ which was realized in 2008 took advantage of the enclosed land, *The ReUNION Public House* in 2012 merged the land with its surrounding public space.

The project was inspired by the 1830 Beer Act. In the act anyone could apply for a license and open up their front room to the public, to sell and even brew beer from their own home. The project was a way to reveal what a Public House could be beyond the initial idea of a pub. Inspired by the playful aspects in the history of the public houses, the *REUNION* was an outdoor place where families and friends could meet, where kids could enjoy a simple paddling pool or hang out in that playful space. *EXYZT* and their friends have lived on the site to host people engaging with the place. The land has catalyzed a network of people around a piece of land and helped to create a vision for a permanent development of the site.

While the collective uses conventional means of architecture through constructing physical platforms, the intention of the installations goes beyond the built structure. The platforms have as a goal the construction of activities and engagement through which space is transformed into place. Those places are open for people to engage with the space, the collective or other people around. The design is on one side the temporary installation and on the other side the action that is made possible through this physical platform.

¹³⁰ Exyzt: Extract of the manifesto on their practice, www.exyzt.org



Image 4. Site before intervention, Union Street, London



Image 5. *The REUNION Public House*, Temporary installation on the vacant site along Union Street, London, to construction action, by Exyzt to construct action, 2012



Image 6. *The REUNION Public House*, Temporary installation on the vacant site along Union Street, London, to construction action, by Exyzt to construct action, 2012

3. Alive Architecture: Infrared-Food for Love, Brussels, 2012

„Realizing actions with quick and simple means allows observing people’s reaction in order to improve the intervention.”¹³¹

Alive Architecture is a Brussels-based practice founded by myself in 2010: an architect, practitioner, educator and researcher. The agency applies urban actions in order to reveal the potential of a site through engaging with local people. In commissioned projects this method is applied in order to test a preliminary design proposal that will then be furthered through the observation of reactions. In self-initiated projects the quick and simple interventions are a way of engaging with a site and the locals. Through a continuous feedback loop between action and observation of reaction the project is developed further and may, in case of success, become permanent. The use of popular media as Facebook, postcards, fanzine’s or flyers supports the construction of a network of actors involved into the project.

Infrared was developed in the framework of *Jonction*, a project on Brussels north-south connection. The project is a research into the role of the architect in Brussels red light district *Rue d’Aerschot* that is running parallel to this rail line.

As an entry to act in such a fragile neighborhood I performed intuitively in the street, painting flashes on the sidewalk that indicated programs for the vacant spaces along the street. While the painted flashes did not attract any attention from people, painting and washing the flashes off the ground generated encounter with inhabitants and people passing in the area. This engagement revealed a series of wishes of inhabitants for the street, one of them being a restaurant.

Among a series of other actions responding to people’s needs the principal intervention was the installation of the pop-up restaurant *Piadina Wagon*. The owners sold for the duration of a day their Italian specialties in the street. On one side the installation of the restaurant that expanded

¹³¹ Alive Architecture, reflection on the practice, www.alivearchitecture.eu

onto the sidewalk had a short-term value to improve the livability of the street. On the other side we recognized the socio-economic success of the project and it became evident that there is a potential for pop-up restaurants in the street that may have a long-term impact on the life in the neighborhood. The owners of the Piadina Wagon, agreed to install their restaurant once per month in the street from June to October 2012.

We used local media in order to announce the success of the project and the dates of the presence of the mobile restaurant in the street. After several articles and announcements had been published a second restaurant with the name Pink Panther arrived to sell Lebanese specialties in the street (Figure 3). While the Piadina Wagon stopped their intervention this November, the Pink Panther continues selling Lebanese food once a week in the street.

The project *Infrared - Food for Love* is, similar to the previous casestudies, about designing the process rather than designing an object. Instead of spending weeks on drawing plans, quick and simple urban actions allowed to engage with people in this difficult context, to reveal their needs, test the proposed interventions and to observe reactions. The approach responds on one side to the dynamics of the city and is on the other side an alternative to the long planning process of expensive urban interventions.



Image 7. *Infrared* by Alive Architecture, urban actopm in public space of Brussels red light district by painting and washing off flashes on the sidewalk, 2012



Image 8. Infrared-Food for Love by Alive Architecture, curating the Piadina Wagon in Brussels red light district, a pop-up restaurant run by two Italian girls selling Italian specialties, 2012



Image 9. Parallel to the Piadina Wagon a pop-up restaurant started selling his Lebanese specialties in Brussels red light street.

Where can architecture be?

All three agencies point out that architecture can be approached differently than through designing and constructing buildings. The practices challenge the view of architecture as an independent field of practice through collaborations with other disciplines. The collaborators from other disciplines may be from other creative professions. Beyond this multidisciplinary approach the collaboration with local people seems to be the most relevant issue to the practices. While each of them has their own ways of engaging with people they all build networks through engagement in order to forward the project. Further all three examples expand the office space towards themselves being present onsite. All case studies present a clear shift from object-based design to process-based design – in some cases the process is the final product as in the case of *The REUNION Public House*, in others a way of engaging people into a future project as in the case of *Dreamhamar*.

Conclusion

Even though these approaches might seem to be pioneer approaches, ways of doing architecture differently became a very common interest of architecture offices. One of the publications revealing this tendency is the recent publication *Future Practices*¹³² that presents a series of architectural and multi-disciplinary practices experimenting on the margins of our profession. Rory Hyde even refers to those practices not anymore being marginal but become the center of our discipline. It becomes evident that the three examples in this paper are only an extractions of architectural practices that investigate into how to do architecture differently through the engagement with people.

In order to participate actively into the research into how to expand our discipline from within academic life we have to introduce the experimentation on the margins of architecture into the design studios throughout our architectural institutions. Students should be confronted with questioning the limits of the discipline rather than designing within the conventional means of how to do architecture. Providing for studios that challenge students and force them out of their comfort zone of designing space towards designing process is a first step to forward the issue. Further the expansion of the studio from remaining within the academic walls towards acting in the urban environment will generate a reflection beyond architecture as an isolated field towards working with a socio-economic context. These *Live Projects* could then even have a real impact on the public realm of our cities.

Only through integrating the research on where architecture can be into our curriculum we can participate into the making of innovative future practices that may influence the margins of our discipline and the future role of the architecture.

¹³² Rory Hyde: *Future Practice, Conversations from the Edge of Architecture*, Routledge Publisher, 2012